

**Comprehensive Plan Committee**  
**Minutes May 21, 2002**  
*Third Tuesday of the Month*

Members present: Art Albrecht, Richard Baugh, Les Bolt, Joe Fitzgerald, Jim Huffman, Dorn Peterson, Robert Steere, Carl Wassum, and David Wiens.

Members absent: Todd Alexander, Shelley Baker, Margaret Haynes, Rudy Propst, Kathy Sarver, and Bob Steere.

Staff present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Earl W. Anderson, Senior Planner; and Keith Markel, Planner.

Chairman Huffman called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Comprehensive Plan committee. He then asked for Mr. Anderson to introduce the guest speaker from the Rockingham County Department of Community Development.

Mr. Anderson stated that Rhonda Henderson, the Senior Planner had come to this meeting to share the County's experiences with developing their most recent Comprehensive Plan. The plan will be complete later this summer.

Ms. Henderson began by talking about the public participation component of developing the Comprehensive Plan. She said that they front-loaded the public participation through a series of 14 open forums throughout the County. The meetings were spread out geographically so that every area of the County was covered. Having so many meetings in different areas allowed the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) a chance to hear about interests that were specific to particular areas of the County. At each meeting a large note pad was placed at the front of the room. While the County's consultant was facilitating the meeting, she would write down the key points that citizens would bring up. This would show that the citizen's concerns were being heard and recorded.

Ms. Henderson went on to say that she thought it was a very good idea to have a neutral third party facilitate the meetings. This prevented the meetings from becoming polarized environments of citizens verses government.

The 14 meetings were held close together. Over a span of two to three months they had completed all of the input sessions; often this meant having two per week. They wanted to keep the meetings close together to create a buzz in the community and generate momentum. This let individuals that might not have been able to attend the meeting in their area, a chance to attend another meeting that same week. The Daily News Record was also very good about publicizing the meetings and providing news articles and good ad placements.

After each meeting the notes that were taken down were given to the consultant. He would then compile the ideas and format them to 8 1/2 x 11 paper. After all of the meetings were completed he started writing the chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. The first draft of these chapters were submitted to planning staff for their review. The CPAC then reviewed a chapter each month.

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee consisted of the five members of the Planning Commission and five representatives from each of the five districts within the county, bringing the total size of the Committee to thirty persons. They met at least once a month, with one all day work session where they developed the land use guide. The Committee was broken into groups of four persons. Each group was given a series of maps and markers to draw with. The groups then developed their ideas for land use areas. All of the different group maps were then combined into one model.

The land use guide was projected for 2010, 2020, and 2050. These maps provided a conceptual blueprint for growth in the County.

After the land use guide had been generated, the Committee held six additional public meetings to gather public input from citizens. These meetings lasted around 2.5 hours and were led by the committee members. The first hour consisted of the members making a presentation of what had taken place so far. The remainder of the time was open for public questions and comments.

Chairman Huffman asked what the role of the consultant was during the entire process.

Ms. Henderson stated he facilitated all of the public input meetings. He took the comments and clarified and condensed them into usable data. The consultant also gathered additional data and statistical information. One area where he was a great deal of help was in creating the first draft of the chapters to be placed into the Comprehensive Plan. He also subcontracted out certain areas of the plan to consultants with specific areas of expertise.

Mr. Wiens asked if all of the information and data needed for the Comprehensive Plan has come from the public input meetings.

Ms. Henderson said yes, and some additional information and comments have come from special interest groups.

Mr. Albrecht asked if people were restricted to what was to be talked about, or were they allowed to speak to anything they wanted.

Ms. Henderson said that it was an open microphone and people shared openly about many different issues. The consultant was able to be a neutral third party so no one issue consumed all of the discussion. He was able to offer practical suggestions and was able to cut through some of the issues that clouded people's understanding and get to the heart of the issue. It also helped that he lives in Virginia and already had an understanding of the area.

Mr. Bolt asked if she felt the consultant came into the process with a preconceived notion of the County.

Ms. Henderson said that Milton Herd, the consultant was very fair and open minded throughout the process.

Dr. Peterson asked if Ms. Henderson felt that Mr. Herd just plugged the County's information into his Comprehensive Plan formula or did he take the time to create a unique document for Rockingham County.

Ms. Henderson said that the plan is unique. Mr. Herd drafted the first copy of the report and planning staff and the committee were involved in adjusting the text to make it as precise as possible.

Chairman Huffman asked if the City's Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee should generate a list of issues or concerns to spark interest and attract the public to the meetings.

Ms. Henderson said that might be a good idea. The more citizens feel that they have a personal stake in something, the more likely they will be to show up.

Chairman Huffman asked how many citizens in total participated in the process.

Ms. Henderson said that the number was around 350 to 400 individuals.

Mrs. Turner asked if the County was concerned that so few people came out to represent nearly 60,000 citizens.

Ms. Henderson said that this level of participation was normal. The consultant had seen localities with less involvement.

Mr. Wiens asked if the committee specifically sought out historically underrepresented groups to gather their ideas and concerns.

Ms. Henderson said that they did not target certain ethnicities such as the Hispanic, Slavic, and Russian population. They did however conduct meetings in every part of the County including areas where the Mennonite population would have easy access.

Mr. Wiens then asked if different ethnicities or socio-economic groups were represented on the advisory committee.

Ms. Henderson said that most of the committee was comprised of middle to upper middle class citizens. However, their occupations ranged from farmer to white collar professional.

Chairman Huffman asked if the County had thought of up zoning and down zoning to make the actual zoning more in line with the recommendations of the land use guide for the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Henderson said that down zoning is a very risky legal move. Their first plan is to amend the zoning ordinance.

Chairman Huffman commented on how different the City's Comprehensive Plan will be from the County's. The City is hoping to increase development, while the County is trying to control it.

Mrs. Turner asked if the County's advisory committee was involved with the selection of the consultant.

Ms. Henderson said that they were not. The consultant was selected by staff.

With no further questions the committee thanked Ms. Henderson for coming and sharing the County's experiences.

The group then discussed the need to hire a consultant to facilitate the Comprehensive Plan process. It was unanimously decided that a consultant would be hired.

It was also decided that when the consultant was on board the advisory committee would sit down with him or her and discuss the special needs and issues of the community to provide a better picture of the area.

Mr. Bolt said that it would be a good idea for the committee to have some idea as to how public input would be gathered.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked if there were any limitations as to how much involvement the whole group could have with the selection process for the consultant. He stated that Council members are excluded from the hiring process for the City except for three positions.

Mrs. Turner said that staff would look into that issue.

It was also requested that staff provide a sample RFP (request for proposal) and a Comprehensive Plan development time line be drafted for consideration.

The Committee felt that community meetings should be held in each voting precinct.

Mrs. Turner suggested having one general meeting where different civic and special interest groups could come and share their opinions.

Mr. Wiens said that he would like to see a questionnaire that was mailed out to citizens in the community be a part of the data collection process. He feels that would provide an accurate snapshot of the mood and opinions of the residents of Harrisonburg.

Mr. Bolt said that James Madison University students could help as part of a class project.

Mr. Albrecht said that with students there is always the risk of an incomplete project.

Mr. Wassum questioned how far the committee should go to gather information. If people are not willing to come to the scheduled meetings then maybe they just do not care.

Mr. Wiens said that you must go out and actively pursue groups and ethnicities that have an inherent mistrust of government.

Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Turner said that would be a good question for the consultant as to how to identify and pursue these groups.

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, June 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00p.m. in the second floor conference room of the Municipal Building.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.